

## **FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET**

**Meeting Date:** December 7, 2017

**Agenda Item:** Expansion of Youth Deer Hunt

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Proposed

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**Background:** Season structures and hunting district boundaries are adopted biennially for all game species every other year between December and Final adoptions in February. In proposing regulations to the Commission, FWP proposes existing structure except for specific changes.

During the 2017 legislative session Rep. Lavin introduced HB437 that looked to establish a four-day youth-only deer season in years when the Montana Education Association (MEA) days do not immediately precede the opening of the general big game season. Rep. Lavin graciously agreed to withdraw the bill if FWP would bring it before the Commission for their consideration. The language of the bill is as follows:

- (b) To promote and enhance hunting opportunities for Montana's youth, the commission shall:
  - (i) establish a 4-day, youth-only deer season, except that when youth-only deer season immediately precedes the opening of the general big game season, it is limited to 2 days; and
  - (ii) subject to the licensing provisions of Title 87, chapter 2, open the youth-only deer season to all minors who are 10 years of age or older and under 18 years of age.

A few things that need to be brought to the Commission's attention are:

1. During those years when it would be a 4-day youth hunt all 4 days would overlap archery season. Many archers are likely to oppose this.
2. This proposal would change the definition of youth eligibility for the hunt from 10-15 to 10-17.
3. Current youth hunt opportunities in the regulations for the general archery-only or firearms season for deer, elk, and some B licenses for both are restricted to youth ages 12-15. Expanding the upper age limit of youth eligible for the statewide youth deer hunt to 17 is likely to add a level of confusion for hunters trying to differentiate between the statewide youth hunt and other archery and general season youth opportunities.

**Public Involvement Process & Results:** In addition to public comment at the Dec. 7 commission meeting, public comment will run through 5 p.m., Jan. 24, 2018. Any final adoptions will take place at the Feb. 2018 commission meeting.

**Alternatives and Analysis:** Proposals may be adopted as proposed, or with adjustments, additions, or deletions.

**Agency Recommendation & Rationale:** Information concerning this proposal may be further articulated at the Dec. 7 commission meeting. FWP recommends this proposal be adopted for public comment.

**Proposed Motion:** I move the Fish and Wildlife commission adopt for public comment the proposed four-day youth-only deer season in years when Montana Education Association days do not immediately precede the opening of the general big game season, and to open the youth-only deer season to all minors who are 10 years of age or older and under 18 years of age as proposed by FWP. Unless addressed in separate proposals, other aspects of the deer season would remain unchanged.